

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1248

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PORG CE BM

SUBJ: NAC COUNTRY STUDIES: BURMA

REF: STATE 082479

1. SUMMARY. BURMA IS ONE OF ORIGINAL NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES AND EARLY PARTICIPANT IN NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT. IT HAS GENERALLY, IN LINE WITH ITS FOREIGN POLICY OF STRICT NEUTRALITY, PLAYED INCONSPICUOUS ROLE AT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCES, AND HAS USUALLY ABSTAINED ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES. HOWEVER, BURMESE FOREIGN POLICY HAS TILTED SLIGHTLY TOWARD GREATER SOLIDARITY WITH NON-ALIGNED MAJORITY SINCE FALL OF INDOCHINA. (AND GUB IS NOW MORE INCLINED THAN IN PAST TO VOTE WITH MAJORITY OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES ON CONTENTIOUS ISSUES.) USG ABILITY TO INFLUENCE GUB EXTREMELY LIMITED. GUB WILL LISTEN TO REASONED ARGUMENT AND MAY BE INFLUENCED BY IT, BUT IN END WILL GO ITS OWN WAY. END SUMMARY.

2. HISTORY OF MEMBERSHIP. BURMA IS ONE OF INITIAL PARTICIPANTS IN NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, AS MOVEMENT FIT IN WELL WITH FOREIGN POLICY BASED ON NEUTRALISM WHICH WAS ADOPTED BY BURMA ON ATTAINING INDEPENDENCE IN 1948. BURMA HAS NEVER PLAYED A LEADING IN THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, ALTHOUGH IT HAS ATTENDED EVERY NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE SINCE THE FIRST ONE IN BELGRADE IN 1961. BURMA HAS DEPARTED FROM ITS INCONSPICUOUS POSTURE ONLY TWICE: IN DECEMBER 1962, WHEN THE THREAT OF WAR ON THE SINO-INDIAN FRONTIER CLOSE TO BURMA CAUSED THEN GENERAL NE WIN TO ATTEND SIX NATION NON-ALIGNED "MINI" SUMMIT IN CEYLON WHICH ATTEMPTED TO MEDIATE THE DISPUTE;

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AND IN 1969 WHEN BURMA'S REPRESENTATIVE AT THAT YEAR'S CONSUL-

TATIVE MEETING OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS OPENLY DECLARED BURMA'S
OPPOSITION TO ANY ATTEMPT TO TRANSFORM THE MOVEMENT INTO POWER
BLOC OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS.

3. IN WAKE OF FALL OF VIETNAM IN APRIL 1975, GUB EVIDENTLY
REASSESSED ITS ASIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND MOVED IT SLIGHTLY TOWARD
GREATER SOLIDARITY WITH OTHER NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES. SENIOR GUB
OFFICIAL DESCRIBED CHANGE AS BEING FROM "PASSIVE" TO "ACTIVE"
NEUTRALITY. IN PRACTICE THIS APPEARS TO MEAN THAT GUB MORE INCLINED
THAN IN PAST TO VOTE WITH MAJORITY OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES ON
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES, AS HAPPENED AT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE IN
LIMA LAST AUGUST, WHEN BURMA CONCURRED WITH CONSENSUS VOTE ON
KOREAN QUESTION. (ON OTHER HAND, THERE APPEARS TO BE SOME CONCERN
AMONG FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS THAT "NON-ALIGNED" ARE MOVING TOO
FAR TO LEFT; THIS MAY PUSH BURMA BACK TO RIGHT AT FORTHCOMING NON-
ALIGNED CONFERENCE).

4. REASONS FOR MEMBERSHIP. A SMALL, POOR COUNTRY WITH POWERFUL
NEIGHBORS, BURMA HAS LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO PURSUE FOREIGN POLICY
OF NEUTRALITY. ITS MEMBERSHIP IN NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT NATURAL
OUTGROWTH OF THIS POLICY. ITS PARTICIPATION IN NON-ALIGNED MOVE-
MENT, HOWEVER, RESTRICTED BY SAME CONSIDERATIONS THAT GENERATED
POLICY OF NEUTRALITY; GUB WOULD NOT GO ALONG WITH NON-ALIGNED
ACTIONS OFFENSIVE TO ITS POWERFUL NEIGHBORS, CHINA AND INDIA.

5. FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS. BURMA'S PRINCIPAL FOREIGN POLICY
INTEREST IS NATIONAL SURVIVAL, AND, BEYOND THAT, ASSISTANCE WITH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. GUB WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ANYTHING WHICH
WOULD ASSIST IT IN OBTAINING HIGHER RETURNS FOR ITS PRINCIPAL
EXPORTS: TROPICAL HARDWOODS AND RICE. EVEN IN THIS AREA, ITS
ACTIVISM IS LIMITED; FOR EXAMPLE, ALTHOUGH A TIN PRODUCER, IT IS
NOT MEMBER OF INTERNATIONAL TIN COUNCIL, WHICH ATTEMPTS TO REGULATE
PRICE OF TIN.

6. ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO BURMA. MOST ISSUES WHICH CURRENTLY
AGITATE THE THIRD WORLD ARE OF LITTLE DIRECT INTEREST TO BURMA,
ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE COUNTED ON TO MAKE APPROPRIATE GESTURES (CONDEMN
APARTHEID; SUPPORT ARABS ON PALESTINE ISSUE.) ONE EXCEPTION HAS
BEEN KOREAN QUESTION WHICH LOOMS LARGE IN BURMESE MINDS LARGELY
BECAUSE OF GUB'S DESIRE TO BE ACCEPTED BY NEARBY COMMUNIST STATES
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(PRINCIPALLY HANOI) AS SOCIALIST COUNTRY IN GOOD STANDING.
RANGOON IS ATTRACTED TO IDEA OF LOOSE COOPERATION WITH HANOI AS
MAJOR FORCE FOR "INDEPENDENCE" (I.E., FROM CHINB) IN REGION.
GUB CAN THEREFORE BE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT NORTH KOREAN POSITION ON
KOREAN QUESTION IN INTERNATIONAL FORA; SIMILARLY GUB WOULD SUPPORT
COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THEM.
(IT IS WORTH NOTING IN THIS REGARD THAT NORTH KOREA'S KIM IL SUNG
IS EXPECTED TO VISIT BURMA JUST BEFORE OR JUST AFTER NON-ALIGNED

CONFERENCE AND BOTH THE VIETNAMESE AND NORTH KOREAN FONMINS
RECENTLY VISITED BURMA.)

7. ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO U.S.

A. KOREA. AS NOTED ABOVE, BURMA WILL PROBABLY SUPPORT PRO-
NORTH KOREAN RESOLUTION, AS IT DID IN 1975 AT UNGA.

B. MIDDLE EAST. GUB WILL OFFER PRO-FORMA SUPPORT TO ARABS ON
PALESTINE QUESTION, BUT WILL MAINTAIN ITS BASIC NEUTRALITY.
BURMA, FOR EXAMPLE, ABSTAINED ON ZIONISM RESOLUTION AT UNGA LAST
YEAR. BURMA HAS LONG HAD FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND WOULD
BE UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT MEASURES WHICH WOULD THREATEN ITS EXISTENCE.

8. RECEPTIVITY TO US PERSUASION AND INFLUENCE. USG HAS BUT
LITTLE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE GUB. ONLY MAJOR AID, IN NARCOTICS
AREA, IS AS MUCH IN US AS BURMESE INTEREST. ONLY VIABLE APPROACH
IS TO REMEMBER THAT GUB PRIDES ITSELF ON TAKING FOREIGN POLICY
STANDS ON "PRINCIPLE." IT THEREFORE STAND DESIRED BY USG
CAN BE SHOWN TO BE IN BURMESE SELF-INTEREST OR GUB STAND ON SOME
ISSUE CAN BE SHOWN TO COMPROMISE BURMA'S NEUTRALITY, GUB MAY
LISTEN, AND MAY BE INFLUENCED. IN END, HOWEVER, GUB WILL GO ITS
OWN WAY -- I.E., TRUST ITS OWN JUDGEMENT ON WHAT IS OR IS NOT IN
GUB INTEREST OR CONSONANT WITH ITS NEUTRALITY.

9. AS TO OUTLINE, WE BELIEVE, AT LEAST FOR BURMA THAT IT COULD
BE REDUCED TO FOUR SECTIONS: HISTORY; ISSUE IMPOSTANT TO BURMA;
ISSUES IMPORTANT TO US; AND RECEPTIVITY TO US INFLUENCE.
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